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THE GROWTH AND CHARACTER OF THE COMMERCE ON THE GREAT LAKES.

THE growth of lake commerce in recent years has been phenomenal and it is justly attracting a great deal of attention. Unfortunately the statistics covering it are but fragmentary and consequently its development cannot be accurately set forth. This deficiency is, however, in a large measure made good by more or less complete information of the commerce passing through certain channels which, from a statistical point of view, stand in a peculiar relation to lake transportation. The St. Mary's Falls Canal is one of these channels: All of the commerce going to and coming from Lake Superior passes through this gateway, and, thanks to the government officers in whose care this national work has been placed, we have accurate and quite complete statistics of the traffic passing through it. The other and much more important channel is that connecting Lakes Huron and Erie. It is to be regretted that we do not possess equally satisfactory statistics of the commerce passing through this gateway. As the local traffic on the Great Lakes is comparatively insignificant, the two sets of figures would convey a fairly accurate idea of the growth and character of the commerce upon the whole system and its various main divisions. For instance if it were known how much east-bound freight had passed through Detroit River in a year and it were also known how much freight had passed through the St. Mary's Falls Canal eastward bound it could easily be ascertained how much freight had originated on Lake Michigan, as the freight which originates on Lake Huron is but trifling in amount.

The importance of the channel connecting Lakes Huron and Erie is disclosed by the following table, taken from a report of Col. O. M. Poe, U. S. A., Corps of Engineers, which gives the total American tonnage passing both ways from 1880 to 1890 inclusive:

Year	Registered tonnage	Year	Registered tonnage
1880	20,235,249	1886	18,968,065
1881	17,572,240	1887	18,864,250
1882	17,872,182	1888	19,099,060
1883	17,695,174	1889	19,646,000
1884	18,045,949	1890	21,684,000
1885	16,777,828		

No figures for the years after 1890 are given because no reliable statistics have as yet been compiled. It is to be noted that there was but a very slight increase in the commerce passing through this channel

from 1880 to 1891. Since 1890 there has been a considerable increase, if the general impression which prevails be substantially correct.

The nature and volume of this traffic for the season of 1890 will appear from the following table :

Up Traffic					Down Traffic				
				Tons					Tons
Coal	-	-	-	4,960,279	Iron Ore	-	-	-	7,892,395
Miscellaneous	-	-	-	919,405	Lumber, Lath, Shingles, etc.	-	-	-	3,239,114
Cement	-	-	-	95,469	Corn	-	-	-	1,645,280
Stone	-	-	-	79,777	Wheat	-	-	-	794,742
Salt	-	-	-	25,827	Flour	-	-	-	733,399
					Oats	-	-	-	296,183
					Barley	-	-	-	139,733
					Mill Stuff	-	-	-	136,420
					Pig Iron	-	-	-	108,609
					Miscellaneous	-	-	-	486,975
					Flax Seed	-	-	-	75,081
					Rye	-	-	-	42,135
					Copper	-	-	-	40,165
					Ice	-	-	-	24,925
					Stone	-	-	-	15,000
Total Up					Total Down				
6,080,757					15,670,156				

The importance of St. Mary's Falls Canal is disclosed by the following table taken from a report of General Superintendent Wheeler, the engineer in charge of the canal :

Year				Total Freight Net Tons	Year				Total Freight Net Tons
1881	-	-	-	1,567,741	1889	-	-	-	7,516,022
1882	-	-	-	2,029,521	1890	-	-	-	9,041,213
1883	-	-	-	2,267,105	1891	-	-	-	8,888,759
1884	-	-	-	2,874,557	1892	-	-	-	11,214,333
1885	-	-	-	3,256,628	1893	-	-	-	10,796,572
1886	-	-	-	4,527,759	1894	-	-	-	13,195,860
1887	-	-	-	5,494,649	1895	-	-	-	15,062,580
1888	-	-	-	6,411,423					

The exceedingly rapid increase in the amount of the freight passing through the St. Mary's Falls Canal is in striking contrast with the very gradual increase of the amount of tonnage passing through the Detroit River. The increase has been very largely due to the rapid development of the iron mines of the Lake Superior region during the past ten years. The amount of iron ore shipped down from Lake Superior increased rather slowly until 1884, being but 1,136,071 net tons in that year. From 1884, however, the increase has been very rapid. For the season of 1895 it slightly exceeded 8,000,000 net tons and constituted a little more than one half of the total movement of freight through the canal.

The preponderance of east-bound over west-bound freight is also

much more striking than was noticed in the case of the Detroit River. During the season of 1895 the amount of the eastbound freight passing through the American canal was 11,617,404 tons while the west-bound freight was but 2,854,244 net tons.

The volume and character of the commerce passing through both the canals (American and Canadian) during the season of 1895 will appear from the following table recently prepared by General Superintendent Wheeler:

East-Bound.		West-Bound.	
Copper, net tons - - -	107,452	Coal, anthracite, net tons -	452,437
Corn, bushels - - - -	80,859	Coal, bituminous, net tons -	2,122,704
Stone, building, etc., net tons	26,426	Flour, barrels, net tons - -	2,150
Flour, barrels - - -	8,896,497	Grain, bushels, net tons -	35,650
Iron Ore, net tons - - -	8,066,635	Manufactured iron, net tons -	75,376
Iron, Pig, net tons - - -	25,476	Salt, barrels - - -	271,997
Lumber, M. - - -	742,738	Unclassified, net tons - -	294,696
Silver ore, net tons - - -	100	Coal Oil, barrels - - -	35,320
Wheat, bushels - - - -	46,113,186		
Unclassified freight, net tons	136,199		

Attention has been directed to the growth of lake commerce, particularly the rapid increase of the traffic on Lake Superior and the preponderance of east-bound over west-bound freight. In conclusion attention is called to the great simplicity of lake commerce. The four items of iron ore, coal, grain (including flour), and lumber constitute almost the whole of the freight moved.

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